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The Super Market Down the Street



Perhaps you're an eco-conscious consumer trying to make purchases that reflect your sustainable lifestyle. You may crave the most delicious foods that you can find. Or maybe you enjoy interacting with neighbors and shopping with friends. Possibly you're the frugal type, always looking for a bargain. Or it may be that you believe in supporting the local economy. If any, or all, of these descriptions fit you, then your next shopping trip should be to your local farmers market.

At almost any farmers market, you'll find produce fresh from the farm or backyard, baked goods made with love and unique handmade products. "What makes each individual farmers market special is the combination of products, farmers and vendors, size, location and shoppers," observes Dru Montri, association manager for the Michigan Farmers Market Association. "Each of these parts come together to make up the feeling and atmosphere of an individual market, and each is unique."

More than just a distinctive experience, shopping at your local farmers market is one

of the best things you can do for the planet. "What could be more green than cutting out the factory farms?" asks Jayson Otto, market manager of the Fulton Street Farmers Market.

Farmers markets help reduce food miles, thus cutting down on fossil fuel use and the related pollution. "Farmers markets are 'green' because they often encourage purchases from local farmers who have reduced transportation costs, both economically and ecologically," confirms Montri. "Many products are traveling a lot shorter distance from farm to fork." The use of packaging is also greatly reduced at farmers markets as compared with chain supermarkets.

If it's wonderful flavor you're after, then look no further. "Even if shoppers are able to purchase the same products elsewhere, fruits and veggies are often fresher at the farmers market, and the taste is great," Montri advises. "Many farmers at farmers markets also sell varieties that don't ship well or have a long shelf-life, like heirloom tomatoes."

So what fresh-from-the-field offerings can you expect to find at your local market this month? "In June, many farmers will have lettuces, strawberries, asparagus, flowers, eggs, beef, green onions, bread, peas, radishes, milk, fruit trees, chicken, turnips, grains, pork and green garlic, depending upon the individual market," says Montri.

Another aspect of farmers markets is the camaraderie, which is built right in to the experience. "Farmers markets help to create active public spaces, and they can be as much about the social interactions as they are about buying fresh produce," Montri remarks. "In fact, buying fresh produce from farmers is a social interaction, too."

An especially hot topic right now is the rising cost of food, and the very nature of farm-

stores like Wal-Mart shoulder their way into the organics market, people may pause to consider the true "value" of their food. The choice is simple: you can shop at a homogenous chain store and send your money all over the globe, or you can buy directly from the person who produces the food.

The Fulton Street Farmers Market in Grand Rapids is just one fantastic example of these neighborhood super markets. Operating in the same location since 1922, the Fulton Street Market offers locally-grown, fresh-picked fruits and vegetables, handmade items and plants that grow well in our climate. Otto shares just a few of the tantalizing offerings you'll find vendors selling at the Fulton Street Farmers Market: "lamb, chicken, duck, eggs, pork, local honey and excellent baked goods. June will have strawberries, peas,

greens, possibly lettuce, radishes, spinach, green onions, bedding plants and perennials." See fultonstreetmarket.org for more information.

Juicy fruits and crisp vegetables, face-to-face interaction with growers and producers and vibrant urban community spaces: farmers markets offer all these elements and more. If your mouth is already watering for vine-ripened tomatoes, juicy blueberries or oven-fresh homemade bread, now is the best time to visit the convenient and sustainable market waiting to be discovered just down the street.

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Dru Montri, association manager for the Michigan Farmers Market Association



ers markets helps to offset this increase. "With rising gas prices, shipping costs have increased the price of food at supermarkets," says Otto. Transportation and packaging costs are less at farmers markets, which translates directly into lower prices.

Not only do farmers markets benefit your own bank account, they also support and stimulate the local economy, keeping money within the community, increasing employment and attracting business to other retailers in the vicinity. Even as mega-discount

THE DETAILS

Farmers Markets abound all over West Michigan! Below is a sampling of just a few; find more at farmersmarkets.msu.edu.

Fulton St. Farmers Market

1145 East Fulton Street, Grand Rapids
May-Christmas Tuesday-Saturday, 8 AM-4 PM

Alger Heights Farmers Market

Alger Heights Foods, 2420 Eastern Ave. SE, Grand Rapids
Mid July-mid October
Saturdays, 9 AM-1 PM

Metro Health Farmers Market

Near the front of Metro Health Hospital, 1919 Boston Street SE, Grand Rapids
June-August
Second Thursday of the month, 10 AM-2 PM

Southeast Area Farmers Market

Corner of Franklin and Fuller Streets, Grand Rapids
June-October
Thursdays, 12 PM-6 PM

Westside Farmers Market

St. James' Catholic Church Parking Lot, 733 Bridge Street NW, Grand Rapids
May-October
Thursdays, 12 PM-6 PM and Saturdays, 8 AM-12 PM

Byron Center Farmers Market

8350 Byron Center Ave., Byron Center
May-October
Saturdays, 8 AM-1 PM

Hudsonville Farmers & Crafters Market

3302 Prospect Street, Hudsonville
June-September
Wednesdays, 8 AM-3 PM

Allendale Area Chamber of Commerce Farmers Market

Heritage Towne Square Parking Lot, 6101 Lake Michigan Drive, Allendale
June 10-October 7
Tuesdays and Fridays, 11 AM-4 PM

Grand Valley State University Farmers Market

Grand Valley State University Allendale Campus, in the southeast corner of Lot F, Allendale
June 13-August 22
Wednesdays, 10 AM-2 PM

Sweetwater Local Foods Market

At Hackley-Health on Harvey Street, just past the Lakes Mall, Muskegon
June 2-October 27, Saturdays, 9 AM-1 PM
November 3-June, every other Saturday, 9 AM-1 PM

Coopersville Farmers Market

N. Main Street parking lot pavilion, Coopersville
May-October
Wednesdays 8 AM-1 PM

Grand Haven Farmers Market

Next to the Chinook Pier, corner of Harbor Drive & 1st Street, Grand Haven
June-October
Wednesdays and Saturdays 8 AM-2 PM

City of Holland Municipal Farmers Market

Eighth Street Market Place, on 8th Street between Pine and Maple, Holland
May 16-December 16
Wednesdays and Saturdays, 8 AM-5 PM, 9 AM-1 PM

Spring Lake Farm and Garden Market

Church Street just east of the library, Spring Lake - June-mid October
Thursdays, 12 PM-5 PM